



**BEARS ARE  
DANGEROUS**

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Wildlife  
Service



*Two geologists were prospecting on a barren ridge near Coppermine in the Northwest Territories. The men were 16 miles from their camp and had decided to leave their guns behind.*

*Intent upon their work, they failed to notice the approach of three young grizzlies. Without provocation one of the bears suddenly attacked, mauling both men. After about three minutes the bear gave up and ambled away, followed by the other two grizzlies.*

*Fortunately a helicopter passed nearby shortly afterwards and the geologists were able to attract the pilot's attention with a signal mirror. Within an hour the most seriously injured of the two was on his way to hospital in Yellowknife, where he required 100 stitches to close his wounds.*

## **Natural History**

Both black bears and grizzlies are found in relative abundance in the Northwest Territories. Black bears may be found anywhere below the treeline, while grizzlies occur mainly on the tundra and in the Mackenzie Mountains. The average weight of an adult black bear ranges from 115 to 270 kg (about 250 to 600 lb), while an adult grizzly may weigh over 500 kg (1,100 lb).

Both species are generally dormant during the winter months of November to April, although black bears may den up earlier, and the occasional grizzly may still be

about as late as December. Once they have left their dens they may be sighted at any hour of the day, although they are generally more active at night.

The typical lumbering gait and occasionally comic antics of bears are deceptive: they are capable of enormous feats of strength, and sudden bursts of speed which can outpace any man. Both species swim well. Black bears and young grizzlies are also able to climb trees. Although their eyesight is poor, their hearing and sense of smell are excellent.

Both species are termed "omnivorous". This means they eat both vegetable and animal matter. Generally, however, they are vegetarians, feeding on roots, grass and berries. The animal portion of their diet consists of smaller creatures such as insects, fish and rodents, as well as opportunistic feeding on the carrion of big game. Grizzlies occasionally prey on moose and caribou, especially calves. The indiscriminate feeding of all bears on garbage is well-known.

Although bears are generally shy, they are also curious and will investigate any strange object they detect. Black bears are notorious beggars, once habituated to human contact. Nevertheless, scarcely a year passes without a person somewhere in Canada being mauled or killed by a black bear.

Grizzlies are natural enemies of black bears, which will generally flee whenever a grizzly is present. Although more shy and reclusive than black bears, grizzlies have always been known for their strength, intelligence, ferocity and





predictability. Many of the incidents involving grizzlies have resulted from people inadvertently surprising them. In thick bush this may happen without a person being aware of the presence of a grizzly until too late.

Anyone who tempts the approach of any bear, either by handouts, or the careless storage of food or disposal of garbage, is only asking for trouble.

### **Setting Camp**

Select an area where visibility is as restricted as possible. Avoid camping along game trails or in areas rich in berries. Do not camp near streams which contain spawning fish, or near rushing water which may mask the sounds of your party. Especially in the spring, river valleys should be avoided, as these are unusually rich in vegetation which bears feed on.

When you are establishing a large

camp, ensure that buildings have windows near the exit which permit a clear view of the outside. Look for bears before leaving a building, especially at night.

Never leave camp alone.

### **Food**

Improper storage of food and disposal of garbage are probably the most common causes of problems with bears.

Incinerate and bury all garbage. Take special care to burn meat and fish scraps as well as sanitary napkins. Sewage and garbage must be completely burned to ash or otherwise eliminated at least daily. Sewage odours may be eliminated with lye or lime.

Locate your latrine and garbage disposal pit where they can be seen from the main buildings or tents. Dogs should not be allowed into the area. Garbage should be moved to



the disposal area before dark.

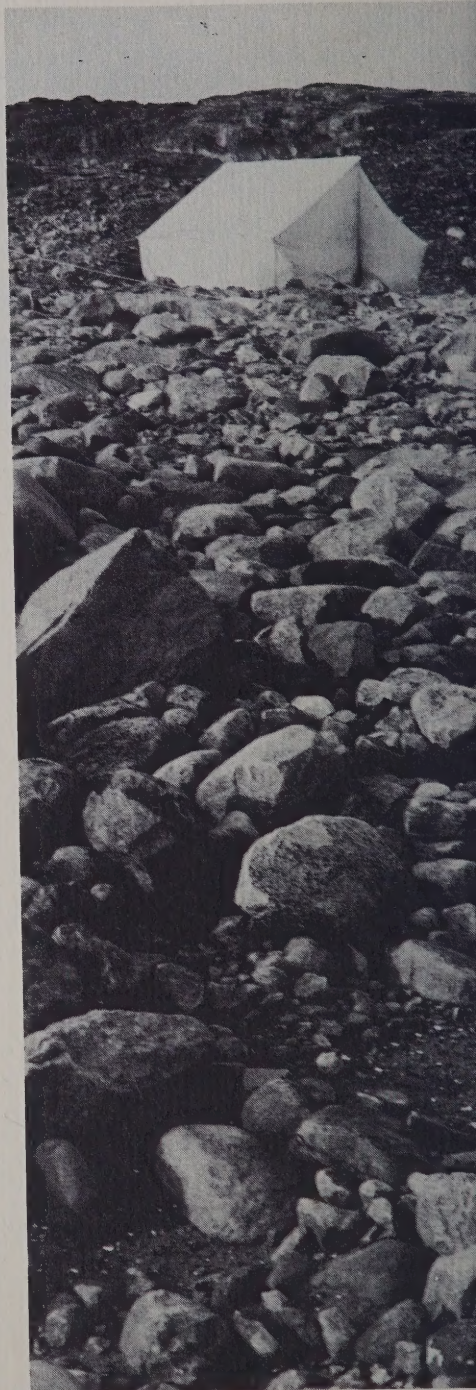
Keep your camp clean — do not give bears a reason for a visit. Clean kitchen utensils after every meal. Keep barbecues and tables free of grease. Pay attention to dishwater disposal.

Wear a hat or kerchief when cooking to reduce the smell of grease which may accumulate in your hair. Avoid storing the clothes you cook in beside your sleeping area. Avoid cooking foods which give off a strong odour, such as canned fish. (Freeze-dried foods are relatively odourless.)

Keep your sleeping area separate from your food storage and cooking area. If your camp is large, store food in bear-proof buildings or sealed metal drums. Otherwise, suspend food at least four metres off the ground well away from the campsite.

It is important to remember that, especially in the case of long-term or permanent camps, bears should be discouraged from visiting the campsite at the outset. Once a bear becomes initiated to camp-robbing, it will be hard to break him of the habit.

For this reason, bears should **never** be fed. Feeding of other wildlife, such as foxes, is equally irresponsible and should not be allowed, as the presence of food scraps may attract bears as well.







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Large groups of people are safer than small groups. Do not allow children to rush ahead. Maintain a good view of the surrounding terrain and avoid areas where a bear could be concealed. An early sighting will give you time to respond.

In any forested area where there are berry patches or young shoots and grasses, caution should be taken.

Be alert. Watch for signs of bear activity, such as scratch or bite marks on trees, ripped-out rotten logs and upturned earth. If you think a bear is nearby, leave the area immediately.

Due to limited visibility in forested areas, hikers should pay special attention to making their presence known to avoid surprising a bear. Common practice is to wear bells or any other noisemaker on your knapsack.

The use of dogs requires special mention. Many people feel safer when accompanied by a dog. In some cases a dog may provide warning of the presence of a bear. However, all dogs are not equally courageous — some may flee, while others will cower and remain silent. In addition, dogs have sometimes provoked incidents by enraging a bear and then returning to their master, bringing the bear with them. Therefore, dogs should always be kept on a leash.

Never approach a fresh kill — a bear may be nearby.

Never approach a cub, even if it appears to be alone. Never get between a cub and its mother.

Do not carry articles which emit a strong artificial smell or food odour.

Menstruating women should avoid travelling through bear habitat.





**Target Area**

## **Hunters and Fishermen**

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**Never leave camp alone.**

Do not sleep in or with clothes soiled or bloodied while hunting or fishing.

Clean fish away from the campsite. Dispose of entrails immediately after cleaning, and uneaten fish immediately after meals.

Store your tackle, knives, nets etc., away from living facilities. Wash off any blood or fish slime that may have accumulated in your boat.

Establish meat caches where they are visible and well-removed from the camp.

Avoid bringing carcasses into the camp area. Set up your processing area away from the camp and leave there anything that has come into contact with animal remains. Do not make more than one trail into camp and approach from the front of the tent.

Use common sense and stay alert.



## Northwest Territories Black Bear Range

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There are no hard and fast rules about what to do if you meet a bear. The reaction of a bear to you will never be entirely predictable.

Make an effort to stay calm and assess the situation. Don't panic. Never run unless you have a head-start and only a short distance to safety. Try to leave an avenue of escape open to the bear, and try to stay upwind of it, to give the bear a chance to identify your scent.

Bears may indicate annoyance by making a huffing sound or chomping their teeth together, lowering their head while facing you, rushing a few paces in your direction

and then stopping. At or before any of these signs there may be time to back out of the situation.

Think about your surroundings before you act. In forested areas the safest escape is usually to climb a tree.





*In the summer of 1978 two young people hiked to Hidden Lake outside of Yellowknife to camp and fish. Suddenly a black bear appeared, forcing the two campers to climb trees. The bear ate all the food in camp, including the fish which had just been caught. Then the bear attempted to climb the trees in which the two campers were hiding. They managed to keep it away by striking it with branches. Finally the bear left, but the campers remained in their trees for five hours before making good their escape.*

## Give the Bear a Chance

Try to scare the bear away first. Bears are inquisitive animals — approaching bear may only be trying to identify you. But don't tempt to scare a bear by approaching any closer than 50 metres, and always carry a firearm just in case. \*

You might be able to scare a bear away by:

- a) firing warning shots. Do not, however, fire towards it, as a ricocheting bullet could injure the animal and add to your problems.
- b) using a scaring device such as a Thunderflash or a shell crack





### Northwest Territories Grizzly Bear Range

which is fired from a shotgun). The Wildlife Service can provide details on how these devices may be obtained.

hooting, banging pots together, or emitting a loud low-pitched grunt or growl.

**NOTE WELL:** Unless you have a valid N.W.T. hunting licence, you are prohibited from carrying an **unsealed** firearm in a camp outside a settlement or municipality which is used for construction, exploration, scientific research, mining or surveying. Contact the nearest Wildlife Officer for specific details, and to have your firearm sealed (if applicable).

Since it is impossible to practice with a sealed firearm without breaking the seal, ensure familiarity with your weapon by practising before arrival in camp.

### If You Must Kill . . .

You should be armed with a high-powered rifle of sufficient calibre (such as a .308, 30-06 or 7mm magnum), or a 12 gauge shotgun with SSG loads or slugs. \*

Purchase weapons from a reliable manufacturer. For your own protection buy the best weapon you can afford. Shooting a bear which is threatening you will take nerve and skill.





*Also in 1978 the remains of a lone hiker were found on the west side of the MacKenzie River near Norman Wells. The hiker had failed to arrive at a rendezvous point to be picked up by aircraft. The rifle he had been carrying was found with an expended cartridge in the chamber. Grizzly tracks were in evidence everywhere around the remains.*

Be familiar with the operation of your gun. Practice with it. \* Know how to operate the safety. Keep your gun clean and guard against condensation which may cause rust, freeze the mechanism, or form an ice plug in the barrel.

Ensure that the location of your firearm is known and within easy reach of all. The magazine would be loaded at all times. Do not, however, put a shell into the chamber unless danger is imminent.

If killing is unavoidable, shoot at the front shoulder region. This will stop the bear from coming closer, running wounded through the camp. It will give the time you need for a killing shot if it is necessary. Keep firing aimed shots until the bear is dead.

### **Alone and Unarmed**

If possible, seek shelter in a building, vehicle or tree.

If there is no shelter nearby, stay on your ground. Don't run. Continually face the animal and growl or roar in a loud, low-pitched voice. Drop your pack or any article of clothing and back away. This may distract the bear. Drop any food you may be carrying.

If contact appears unavoidable, you must make every effort to protect your vital organs. Drop to the ground, knees drawn up to the chest and hands clasped tightly over the neck. Keeping still is



of utmost importance. If a bear  
try to maul you, serious injury  
be reduced or prevented by  
ing still. Most people survive  
maulings.

## **Law**

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are within the law to shoot a  
**only** when life or property is  
tened. The incident must be  
rted to the nearest Wildlife Of-  
immediately.

an offence to allow the hide of  
ar to spoil. The hide becomes  
property of the Government.  
d the skull (or lower jaw) must  
urned in to a Wildlife Officer.

bear should be skinned im-  
ately. The hide should be pro-  
cleaned, stretched and dried  
liberally salted — or frozen  
prevent spoilage.

ose of the carcass as best you  
Failure to do so may invite  
visits by other bears.

**let your carelessness cause  
nnecessary death of a bear —  
other human being.**





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